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SPIRITUAL WORSHIP.

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"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth."—John iv. 24.

It is from the Bible alone, directly or indirectly, that we gain correct ideas, either of the natural attributes, or of the moral character of God. However distinctly we may trace the impress of his hand in his works when we already believe in his existence and true attributes, and however possible it might be for man, if his powers were unaffected by sin, to discover from the things that are made the eternal power and Godhead of the Creator, yet the whole history of the race shows that, for this purpose, nature is not to man its own interpreter.

Everywhere, and under all circumstances, men "have become vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart has been darkened." If the great doctrines of the unity and spirituality of God, did, indeed, glimmer in upon the minds of some of the heathen philosophers, yet no *people* of ancient times received and retained them except the Jews. Hence, when we pass from the heathen philosophers and poets to the prophets and poets of the Jews, we are in a new world, as respects every thing that relates to God. Here his being and attributes are set forth in the highest strains of poetry. And this poetry is also truth. It is philosophy transfigured, and therefore it never

grows old. Even now, after more than three thousand years, after every discovery of science, it stands in all the original freshness and unapproachable majesty of the starry heavens.

But what they thus set forth in poetry, is disclosed in its simplest form by our Savior. "God is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth." Probably few have read this passage without being struck by it. How simple the words! The doctrine stated—how great! yet how simply, and naturally, and incidentally introduced! The inference respecting the worship of God—how irresistible, and important, and all-comprehensive, and yet how entirely in opposition to the prevailing opinions both among Jews and Gentiles! Certainly if there is an instance in which the announcement of a truth, in distinction from the manifestation of power, may be said to produce sublime emotions, it is this.

The text is naturally divided into two parts.—The fact, or doctrine stated, and the inference from it. It is not my purpose, at this time, to dwell upon the doctrine; I propose rather to consider the characteristics of acceptable worship here stated; and the best means of promoting it.

The characteristics of acceptable worship, as given by our Savior, are two. It must be, first, *in spirit*, and second, *in truth*.

What then is included in the worship of God in spirit, or in spiritual worship?

I. And first, I remark, that to worship God in spirit, we must worship him *as a spirit*, and without the intervention of any sensible forms. In the present state of man, he does not readily form to himself the idea of a God who is a spirit, infinite, eternal and holy. Accustomed to objects of sense, he seeks for something visible, or represents God to himself by the conceptive faculty, under some sensible form. Little aware of the distinction between a conception and an idea, or that the true *idea* of God, *must* exclude any particular conception or imagination, he is ready to disbelieve in the existence of any thing of which he cannot conceive, and when he would think of it, there is a mere blank in his mind. When he would pray to God, he seems to be praying to nothing. He asks in substance the questions of a heathen, as recently given by a missionary—"Why, how can I serve him without an idol? Where can I put the flowers? Where shall I burn the frankincense? How shall I bathe him?" He forgets that even in the natural world he is under the necessity of believing in the existence of many things, as magnetism and gravitation, of which he cannot form a conception. He believes in the existence of these, he has an idea of them as forces, he reasons and acts with reference to them; but if they were intelligent and moral beings, and he were to attempt to address them, he would find the same difficulty that he does in addressing a pure spirit.

But who would think of representing magnetism or gravitation under any material form? Who does not see that any such form must lead the mind from the true idea? But the idea of spirit, requires the exclusion of all the positive conceptions that belong to matter, and the investiture of substance with qualities directly opposite. How utterly absurd then must it be to think of obtaining aid in our approach to a spiritual being by any material image, or any symbolical representation! By any attempt to represent, either to the eye, or to the imagination, "the high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity," the true *idea* of him is not only perverted, but degraded; and all the purifying and elevating effects of worship are destroyed.

Nor is the case altered from the fact that God became manifest in the flesh, since it is not by the eye of sense or of imagination, but of faith, that any thing of what Christ did for our salvation can be perceived. Well has it been said by McLaurin,—“Men may paint Christ's outward sufferings, but not that inward excellency from whence their virtue flowed. They may paint one crucified, but how can that distinguish the Savior from the criminals? We may paint the outward appearance of his sufferings, but not the inward bitterness, or invisible causes of them. Men can paint the cursed tree, but not the curse of the law that made it so. Men can paint Christ bearing the cross to Calvary, but not Christ bearing the sins of many.” If we would worship God in spirit, we must worship him as a spirit.

That God is a spirit, and that he is God, implies that he is infinite and eternal, and possessed of all those natural attributes which are necessary, not indeed as a cause, but as a condition, to all our worship. It is not *because* God is omnipotent or omniscient that we worship him, though if he could not see our worship, or could not do for us what we need, that worship would be vain; but it is because of the moral character which is associated with, and controls these natural attributes.

II. I observe, therefore, in the second place, that the worship of God in spirit, implies the worship of him as a *holy* God. By the holiness of God, I mean all those attributes and expressions of his moral character by which he shows that he loves righteousness, and hates iniquity. Here we find the central and indispensable element in the character of God which makes him the object of worship at all. This stands among the attributes of God, like mount Zion, crowned with the temple among the mountains that were round about Jerusalem. The other attributes are majestic and venerable, but it is from their association with this.

As God is great, he challenges our awe, as he is benevolent, our love; but it is only as he is perfectly holy, that we yield him that delightful reverence and entire moral complacency, which is the frankincense of spiritual worship. It is only those exercises of the

spirit in which we gain clear ideas of the moral character of God, as manifested in his providence, and law, and gospel, and in which we are strongly affected with admiration and love of him as *such* a God, that can be properly called spiritual. If God were not holy, whatever external homage might be rendered, he could not receive true worship from any moral being; and being holy, no moral being can render him true worship without complacency in his holiness.

III. But I observe, thirdly, that the worship of God in spirit, implies that we worship him *with* the spirit. True worship must be intelligent. Plainly we cannot worship God farther than we know him. This is indicated in the context, in which Christ says to the Samaritans, with implied censure, "Ye know not what ye worship." True worship must also be affectionate and from the heart. God makes himself known to us as a Father, and he asks of us a filial temper, that is, the exercise of love and obedience towards him. But knowledge, love, obedience, which comprise the whole of religion, are acts of the spirit, and of that alone.

On this point I need not dwell. Every man knows that any external expression without the corresponding internal feeling, is only hypocrisy and mockery. How obvious then that a spiritual and rational creature can honor God only by knowing, loving, obeying, and adoring him; and that no form, or ceremony, or rite, or offering can be acceptable, except as it expresses the state of the spirit. Hence, as we might expect, if the Scriptures are from God, we every where hear them saying, "My son, give me thy heart." "To love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself, is more than whole burnt offering." "They that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth."

The second characteristic of acceptable worship as stated in the text is, that it should be "in truth." Truth is supposed by some to be contrasted here with the ceremonial forms of the Jews; but as the idea of sincerity is certainly included in that of truth, and as the worship of God in spirit is quite as naturally contrasted with those forms, I regard this as the more probable and important meaning. "God requireth truth in the inward parts." The importance of sincerity is so great, religion is so liable to be, and has been so much perverted to purposes of interest and ambition, that we might reasonably expect that this characteristic would be singled out by our Savior. Entire sincerity—the worship of God for its own sake from motives of duty and affection—from the perception of his glorious character and of our relations to him—this is the great privilege of man, the highest act in which he can engage, and without this no worship can be acceptable. Other things connected with true worship there may be, but this *must* be. "They that worship him *must* worship him in spirit and in truth."

Having thus stated what spiritual worship would include, I observe that it would exclude, and radically destroy every species of superstition. Superstition is one in its principle; but as opposed to spiritual religion it shows itself chiefly as the superstition of place; or of forms; or of priestly intervention; or of the substitution of offerings and bodily sufferings for moral qualities.

But that place cannot be important to spiritual worship is directly asserted in the context, and the supposition that it might be so, is that species of superstition that called forth the text from our Savior. The idea that God might be worshipped in some places more acceptably than in others, has been among the most common forms of superstition, and was almost universally prevalent at that day. Men think of God as such an one as themselves. They do not easily conceive of him as infinite in his presence. They have, moreover, sacred associations with certain places. Hence the shrines and pilgrimages of all ages, not simply for taking advantage of that principle of our nature by which, when we visit the place where interesting scenes have occurred, our conceptions and feelings become more vivid and intense, but because it has been supposed that God was really more present there, and more readily propitiated, and that there was something of merit and holiness attained by visiting such places. But the doctrine of the text sweeps away at once every idea of this kind. God is now known as filling heaven and earth, and as having his eye open, and his ear attent upon every place where worship goes up from humble and penitent hearts.

Nor, I will just say, does this give any countenance to those who withdraw themselves from church on the ground that they can worship God as well at home. Possibly they can, and better. But they cannot worship him there *publicly* and *socially*, nor hear the word of God dispensed by the living preacher; and it is because public and social worship, and the preaching of the gospel, are divine institutions, that men are bound to go to church, and not because the worship of an individual, considered simply and by itself, can be better performed there.

And what is thus true of place, is equally true of forms. All thinking and candid men agree now that no form can be in itself of any value; and also, that when spiritual and true worship is really offered, it is equally acceptable to God, whatever the form may be.

I observe, also, that the worship now spoken of excludes all idea of worship by proxy; all intervention of any man, of any priest, of any church and its officers between the soul and God. It makes religion an individual, personal thing. It brings every man directly to God. Even Christ himself, as mediator, does not, as some seem to suppose, stand between the soul and God. He came to open a way through which we might come to God by him, and all that he has done will avail us nothing unless we ourselves come to God in that way. When will men learn that the fundamental idea of heaven is not that of an es-

tate that can be purchased, or of a place to which they can be carried, but of a state of moral union with God, and of conformity to him! This is, perhaps, the most subtle and dangerous form of superstition of the present day. To say nothing of the papist, who so often does as he is bid, and then transfers the care of his salvation to the priest and the church, there are many protestants who think of a church, and especially of what they imagine to be *the* church, as possessed of some mysterious efficacy, and as able to afford them a security entirely beyond that which they would derive from their immediate relation to God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

The principle of what has just been said, applies so directly to the superstition of substituting offerings and bodily sufferings for moral qualities, that I need not dwell upon that.

Thus the simple words of the text, received by the church, would sweep away at once every form and vestige of superstition, and all hypocrisy. *Superstition* and *hypocrisy*—these have always been the great sources of corruption to the church. They always have come in, and they always will, just in proportion as spiritual worship declines; and it is only by promoting spiritual worship that they can be excluded.

And this leads me to inquire, as was proposed in the second place, how it is that spiritual worship may be best promoted. This is an important inquiry to us, because it is this worship that we, my brethren, as ministers of the gospel, are set apart to promote. It is important too, at the present time, because many seem to be departing from the simplicity of the gospel; and the spirit of form, in opposition to a spirit of faith and of power, seems to be gaining ground. Even in New England, there are not wanting indications that the great principles of the Reformation, will have to be re-asserted and re-vindicated.

The answer to this question must be drawn either from the Bible or from the constitution of man. But these conspire in teaching us, that the worship of God in spirit and in truth, can be promoted only by presenting to the mind the character of God as a spiritual and holy being, as a Father, a Redeemer and Sanctifier, in such affecting lights as to call forth suitable emotions, and a right course of moral action towards him. All truly religious emotion must be called forth in view of some manifestation of the character of God, and it is only as that is presented directly or mediately, that any thing can be done to improve the religious character, or to promote acceptable worship. This is our great principle. Nature is religious only as it manifests God. The seat of religion is in the moral and religious nature of man; and as these are quickened by manifestations of the character of God, and are trained to act rightly towards God and duty, a pure and spiritual worship will not fail to be rendered.

But here the question arises, Are we required by the Bible, or by

the nature of man, to address these faculties alone? May not other faculties and principles of our nature be cultivated in connection with these, not merely incidentally, as many of them must be, but systematically? Here we find the fundamental philosophical question, in the solution of which there is so wide a difference among different sects. We shall touch upon the chief points, both of difference and agreement, if we consider, as I now propose to do, 1st, Whether true religion may not be promoted by addressing the senses and the imagination by means of forms and ceremonies; or 2d, by an appeal to the imagination and to taste through the fine arts; or, 3d, by an appeal to the principle of association; or, 4th, to the social principle and to the affections.

May true religion, then, be promoted by addressing the senses and the imagination by means of forms and ceremonies? And here the first question evidently is, Does God prescribe for us, under the gospel, any forms? And if so, for what purpose? On these points there is little difference of opinion. No pretence can be set up that there is any form of worship prescribed in the New Testament, nor do I know that it is pretended by any sect that there is. The disciples met for worship and prayed; but nothing is said of any order of exercises, or of any ceremonies, or of any uniform attitude. The sacraments were indeed instituted; but the chief object of these was not to promote worship. Their objects are, 1st, to constitute a visible church and to form a bond of union to its members, and 2d, to convey instruction and to affect the heart through the senses, by a language intelligible to all men. But as if to guard even these against abuse, the simplest possible actions were adopted, and nothing is said of the time, or form, or mode in which they were ordinarily administered.

But admitting that no form is prescribed in the New Testament, may not the church adopt certain forms, which, according to the constitution of human nature will promote true devotion? Has not man a body as well as a soul, and in his present imperfect state may not such forms be important helps?

Concerning this, I observe, that if any form could have been devised that would, on the whole, have been so adapted to human nature as to promote true worship, it would not have been omitted in the New Testament. I distrust altogether any compassion for the weakness of man, and any skill in overcoming it, that goes beyond those manifested by God. I know there are those who say that these things are nothing in themselves, but that in the present state of human nature and of intelligence among the people, they are necessary to attract attention and to keep alive a suitable reverence in their minds. For themselves they do not need them, but they are necessary for the people. But what is the state of intellectual and spiritual manhood for the race? Let us know this, and this whole question is settled: Is it one in which forms are abolished, and in which man worships his

Creator in simplicity, in spirit and in truth? If it is, then the proper mode of leading him to this is not through forms. For, let forms be once introduced, and we might certainly know that they would be retained by selfishness and the love of power on the one hand, and by habit and association on the other; and thus either hold the race in perpetual childhood and imbecility, or greatly embarrass and retard its growth. If the young bird is to fly, let it be thrown into the atmosphere. If man is to worship God in spirit and in truth, he must not be encumbered with forms.

And what we might thus anticipate, all history shows has taken place. By means of forms and ceremonies, the mind has, 1st, been drawn from God; and, 2d, it has rested in them, so that they have been substituted for a Savior and for holiness of heart. Thus it is in the church of Rome. By her forms she does the two greatest possible evils to true religion. She corrupts the simple and spiritual worship of God, and she substitutes a false ground of hope to man. These two are intimately connected; for it will be found that whenever works are relied on as the ground of salvation, they most often consist in the observance of those forms by which the simplicity of worship is marred and corrupted. These evils have always resulted from forms and probably always will. They cling, to some extent, around those that are simplest; and the danger is increased in proportion as forms are increased and rendered more imposing. The simple worship of God in spirit and in truth, in opposition to all superstition and hypocrisy; and justification by faith alone, in opposition to all priestly interposition and ceremonies of the church, and penances, and meritorious works, are the two great points for which we are now to contend. These have always been inscribed upon the true banner of the church of God. Over our churches that banner still waves. Let us gather around it. Let us abide steadfastly by it, if need be, even unto death.

We now proceed to inquire, whether the pure and spiritual worship of God may not be promoted by addressing the imagination and the taste through the fine arts. Do not these blend with the movements of the religious nature, and become as the wings of devotion to raise the soul nearer heaven? No doubt here is one great secret of the power of the Romish church over the minds of her people. She has intimately associated all the fine arts with religion, so that while she has her forms and superstitions for the many, she has made the church, independently of religion, an agreeable place of resort for the refined. Men love excitement; there is a pleasure connected with emotion of almost every kind; but in the emotions awakened by the fine arts there is a high luxury. Let then these emotions be connected with the awe thrown around religion, and especially let them be made to soothe the conscience as a religious duty, and it is easy to see how strong the attraction they may constitute. But all this pleasure

and emotion may arise in those who are entirely corrupt and worldly in their lives, or who are even infidel in their sentiments. What men wish to avoid, is a holy God, a perception of his moral government, and of their obligations and accountability to him. They wish to have their fears and their consciences quieted by something like religion, and they are willing and pleased to have all those emotions of awe, and sublimity, and admiration awakened, which arise in view of the natural attributes of God in distinction from those that are moral, or better still, to have excited by the fine arts, under the name of religion, emotions kindred to these.

In the present moral state of the world there will be something of this wherever the progress in wealth and refinement is considerable. For what can a man do who is cultivated, and lives in refined and fashionable circles, and who would keep upon good terms with himself and with the church or with the religious world, and who yet cannot submit to bring his conscience and his whole moral being into subjection to God? How can such a man spend his Sabbaths? Will he be satisfied to go to a plain house of worship and simply listen to devout prayers and to the truth? No. He will either take a walk, or a ride, or a sail, and talk of seeing God in his works—a God that, as he sees him in those works, has no moral law and does not speak to his conscience; or he will go to a church where there is architecture, and music, and it may be painting and sculpture, and where it is well if there be not a preacher whose preaching chimes in and harmonizes with all this. The same general tendencies which lead the hearer to seek gratification from the fine arts, will lead the preacher to cultivate elegant literature, and to become a general scholar and a fine writer, rather than a man of prayer and mighty in the Scriptures.

Would you then, it may be asked, exclude the imagination and the class of emotions now referred to from divine worship? I answer, No. But I would have them called forth by the attributes, and by the present or the remembered works of God, rather than by the works of man. If I cannot worship in the broad temple of God's works; if I cannot, like the Saviour, pray upon a mountain, where, it may be, the starry heavens are above me and the breathing stillness of nature is around me, or where, it may be, the voice of the tempest is in the top of the great oak by which I kneel, and its roar is among the hills, while the lightning writes the name of God on the sky and the thunder speaks of his majesty; if I cannot stand by the sea-shore and hear the bass of nature's great anthem, yet let no poor work of man come between me and the remembered emotions which such scenes excite in the hour of my worship before the great and holy God, whose hand made all these things. "Where is the house that ye build for me?" says God, "and where is the place of my rest?" "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool." Far rather would I find in the simplicity of the place of worship a confession of its inadequacy to lead the mind up to God, than to find any beauty of

architecture, or any gorgeousness of decoration that would lead me to admire the work of man, and draw the mind from God.

Here, however, God has left man at liberty; and much is to be allowed for the influence of education, and constitutional peculiarity, and early associations and impressions. I have no sympathy with that state of mind which would prevent worship in a cathedral. God is there. But I would have it forgotten that it is a cathedral, and remembered that *God is there*. I would so magnify God, and bring his spiritual presence so near, that those things should be indifferent, and that in the cathedral, as well as in the plain church, or under the open heaven, men should equally worship God in spirit and in truth. There is, however, great danger that the excitement of what is poetical and imaginative in man by architecture and music,* considered simply as music, and painting, and statuary, should be substituted and mistaken for the pure and holy worship of God.

On this point the simplicity of Puritanism has been regarded as austere. But so has the true worship of God always been regarded by the many. While therefore we find in our Bibles, and in the works of God, the motives and the media of worship, while we are willing and desirous that the fine arts should have their appropriate temples and be cultivated as they ought to be among a refined people, we yet remember that even under the old dispensation, the acceptable worship went up from an altar of unhewn stone; and we think it best accords with the spirit of the New Testament, and is shown by history to be safest, and is most conducive to the worship of God in spirit and in truth, that a chaste simplicity should characterise all the structures and all the forms of our religion. We think that the appropriate object of religious services is to cultivate the moral and religious nature, and that there should be no attempt to produce an effect upon the mind by forms, or to blend the emotions appropriate to the fine arts with those higher emotions that belong to the worship of God.

Perhaps our Puritan ancestors carried their feelings on these points too far; but we think it can be shown from the nature of things, and from the developments of the times, that they were substantially right, *and we abide in their faith*. I would rather have joined in one prayer with the simple pastor and his persecuted flock among the glens and fastnesses of the rocks in the highlands of Scotland; I would rather have heard one song of praise rise and float upon those free breezes in the day when the watch was set, and the bloody trooper was abroad, set on by those who worshipped in cathedrals; I would rather have kneeled upon the beach with the company of the Mayflower when persecution was driving them into the wilderness, than to have listened to all the rituals and Te Deums in every cathedral in Europe.

* On no account would I say any thing to discourage the universal and high cultivation of sacred music. This differs from the other fine arts, because its appropriate office is not impression but expression. Where it is regarded and admired for its own sake, it obstructs instead of promoting the worship of God.

We next inquire whether we may not take advantage of the principle of association to aid devotion, and especially of that well known fact that our ideas of things invisible become more vivid and affecting, and permanent, when they are associated with sensible objects. Has not our Savior himself taken advantage of this principle in instituting the sacraments? and may we not follow his example and carry out the same principle in other things? Will not a cross, erected or represented in the church, remind us of our Savior's sufferings? Will not consecrated water at the door, remind us of our need of purification? Will not incense ascending, give us an affecting sense of the efficacy of prayer? Will not a relic of some ancient saint, remind us of his virtues and lead us to imitate them? May we not usefully set apart, as they did under the old dispensation, a particular form of vestment in which the ministers of religion shall officiate, and which shall be associated in the minds of the people only with the solemn services of religion? May we not, in these, and in many more ways, employ this principle to aid true devotion?

It is not surprising that this should have been attempted. Probably it has been done in most instances from good motives, but the result has shown that "the foolishness of God is wiser than men." It might have seemed to the wisdom of man that to have the body of their great prophet buried among them, and a monument erected over it, would remind the ancient Israelites of their deliverance from Egypt, and of the law he gave. But God buried him where no man knoweth of his sepulchre till this day. He left no relic or vestige of him to be a source of superstition in other days. This shows his estimate of the principle, and the results where this has been attempted are such as to make us feel, that though it may be sometimes innocent, it is always dangerous, and to lead us to observe only those forms which the Savior instituted as necessary to the visibility of his church. When we see, at this day, a whole city moved because a bone of a good man, who died some one thousand four hundred years ago, is, or is supposed to be found; and when we see the dignitaries of a church performing over it ceremonies and carrying it in pompous procession; and when we see the same people burning Bibles and persecuting those who would enlighten the people, we feel that we cannot be too careful how we take the first step towards a degeneracy and a perversion of the gospel so awful.

The question is not whether the principle of association shall operate in connection with religion. It will and must do so in connection with the visibility of the church in any form, and around that church associations the most tender, and hallowed, and enduring, will cluster. But it is whether we are to adopt the principle and act upon it as a system. No doubt it gives the church a strong hold upon the people. It enables her to fix a stamp early and firmly on the minds of the young; but that stamp is the mark of the beast, and not the seal of the Spirit. It is one great instrument by which the systems of heathen superstition are sustained and riveted. It always has led to su-

perstition, and it always will. Paul said, "though I have known Christ Jesus after the flesh, yet now henceforth know I him no more." The religion of Christ is a moral and a spiritual system, and all attempts to associate its great truths with sensible objects, will bring the mind down to them, instead of carrying it up to those truths.

But, my brethren, if there are these dangers connected with the introduction of forms and of the fine arts, and of the principle of association, neither is our simple mode of worship without its dangers. The danger on the one side is of formality and superstition; on the other, of indifference and want of reverence. This is often painfully evident in our congregations to the neglect of what may be called expressive forms, and the natural language of the emotions. God has so connected the mind with the body, that to every emotion there is a natural form of expression; and that the emotions connected with worship should not be expressed by some appropriate external sign, is both unseemly, and tends to destroy the emotion itself. In many of our congregations we are pained to notice during worship an entire want of uniformity of posture and of the appearance of devotion.

Another danger is, that worship, appropriately so called, will lose its proper relative place. We meet in public for the purpose of social worship, and of instruction, and every thing done may be said to consist of worship and of the sermon. In ancient times, the great thing was the worship. When the gospel was preached, instruction evidently became much more prominent, but still worship is the highest employment. The object of knowledge is to lead to intelligent worship. I care not how high a place the sermon may hold absolutely, I would honor the preaching of the gospel as the great means appointed by God for saving men, but relatively the sermon should be subordinate to the worship. But without being formally stated, it has been practically felt, that in the simplicity of our worship, more must be done in the sermon to make the house of God attractive; and hence it is undoubtedly true, that the power of preaching has been more cultivated, and the relative position of the sermon has been higher with us than with most other denominations. Perhaps this must be so to some extent.

The sermon is the proper place for an address, not only directly to the understanding and heart, but also incidentally to the taste and the imagination; and while the irreligious man cannot be expected to join in the worship of God, he may be gratified and instructed by the sermon, and it would seem a matter of course that it should form the chief attraction for him. It is not of this that I complain, but that ministers themselves, and religious people, too often think more of the sermon than of the other parts of divine service, and that there is among us a want of the proper cultivation of the feeling of reverence and of devotion in the worship of God. The house of God is not a mere place for preaching. This I am persuaded it is in the power of

the pastors to remedy, not by neglecting their sermons, but by cultivating in *themselves* the spirit of devotion, and by proper instruction of the people.

But if we may not appeal to the people through forms, or the fine arts, or the principle of association, except incidentally, there is yet one principle to which we may appeal in sustaining religion, and one too, the power of which needs to be more fully brought forth in these latter days—I mean, the social principle and the affections. “Behold,” said the heathen, in the early days of Christianity, “how these Christians love one another.” When genuine love exists in a community towards a common object, and towards each other, there will be no difficulty in bringing them together, and in making them efficient in action. Mightier far is this—love to the Savior, love to their pastor, love to each other, love to a world perishing around them, than taste, or imagination, or associations connected with any outward form. In this alone will the true ground of the efficiency of any church be found. Having this, they will meet together and sustain the institutions of religion, and labor, and pray, and give; and having not this, there will be the form of godliness without the power thereof.

It is one excellence of our religion, and an evidence of its divinity, that it not only regards man as related to God in his individual capacity, but that it takes into view his social nature, and fits him to be the member of a perfect community. Hence the social principle in all its forms, from the slightest manifestation of natural affection and neighborly kindness up to the peculiar love which Christians bear each other, ought to be cultivated in the church, and to be associated with the worship and the institutions of religion. If the social principle could have free power in religion—if restraints and formalities could be broken away, and soul could commune with soul, with the same freedom on this as upon other subjects, I feel that one great barrier would be removed, and that the waters of salvation would flow more freely through all the channels of society. And the church is an institution admirably adapted to facilitate this. The proper idea of a church, is that of a body of men associated together for the purpose of aiding each other in mutual edification—that they may be more fully conformed to the Savior, and may better serve God, and build up his kingdom in the world.

But how is it now? When a man joins a church, does he feel that it is to be the means of cultivating his social nature? Does he feel and find that he is associated with a band of brethren who regard his best interests, and watch over them? Does he feel that he has entered into an association where his affections are to be called forth, and his energies are to be enlisted as in a school of mutual improvement, and for the purpose of doing good? How is it with the meetings of the church? Is any thing done for mutual improvement or social culture? Is there a free expression of feeling? Or are they cold and formal?

My brethren, I put these questions, not knowing how these things may be in your churches, but with the conviction that the power of the church, as a social institution, is little known, and that one of its great energies is slumbering. This is a point to which I would gladly call the attention of this body, because I think it vital to the interests of the church. Are church members sufficiently aware of their relative duties? In the pursuit of gain—in the contests of ambition—in the demands of fashion—perhaps sometimes in the calls of benevolent societies, are not the claims of the church and of the members of Christ's body neglected? May not the pastor do more in making it felt that he is not simply a preacher, but a *pastor*, a leader of the church in spiritual activity, earnestly engaged in promoting the cause of Christ in every way, and that they are to co-operate with him?

May not Sabbath Schools, and Bible Classes, and social meetings be instituted—let any man read the life of Baxter and he will see that they may—so as to engage the affections and associations of the young, and to call forth the zeal and activity of all? May not all be made to feel that they have something more to do in sustaining the cause of religion than simply to attend meeting? Let a church have its affections and its activity thus, or in any other way excited, and let them feel that their pastor is truly a pastor and a leader, and that they are co-operating with him, and they will go to the house of God, not to be entertained, but to worship him, and will be glad to hear, in connection with his institutions, a plain sermon. They will seek to honor God's institutions, to learn their duty, and will cease to send their thoughts, with the fool's eyes, to the ends of the earth in search of great men. Then should we see, not simply individual Christians in their closets, but whole churches unitedly, socially, worshipping God in spirit and in truth. I do believe that the spirit of activity, and of Christian affection, and of devotion, may be so cultivated that there shall be fewer itching ears, and fewer disastrous changes in the ministry.

From the subject, as thus presented, I remark, 1st, That we see what it is that God values and seeks for as his holy eye looks down upon the multitude of costly churches in Christendom, and upon the crowds that weekly assemble in them. It is upon the spiritual worshipper alone, however humble and neglected by the crowd, that he looks with complacency.

I remark, 2d, That the labors of those who would promote spiritual worship must be great. This must be so in any form in which a church and its worship can be constituted, because it implies an opposition to the whole force of human corruption, and to that desire to get to heaven without holiness of heart, which is the very essence of popery and paganism and formality. But emphatically must this be so with us, as so much of the interest of the worship must depend upon the pastor.

Very different is it in most other denominations. In the papal church the forms are every where the same, and one man can go through them as well as another. The preaching is relatively nothing. In the Episcopal church the prayers are composed by the church, and much of the duty of a clergyman consists in going through with a prescribed form. In the Methodist church the system of itinerancy prevents the necessity of mental labor for more than four or five years. No so in the Congregational churches. In them the whole responsibility, both of the worship and of the sermon, comes upon the pastor, and he must appear from year to year before the same intelligent and thinking people. This is a burden which the Spirit of God, in connection with the prayers of the church, can enable a man adequately to sustain, and nothing else can. Into such a ministry, few will enter that they may enjoy literary leisure; and though some may do it, as we doubt not they do, from sincere conviction, yet we do not wonder that the ambitious, the lovers of ease and pleasure, and those in whom the imagination preponderates, should go out from among us. But if our labors are arduous, or our sacrifices great, they are not such as were those of our great Master and of his Apostles. In their footsteps we think we follow. To them we look for an example.

We claim for ourselves whatever there is that is venerable in an antiquity higher than that of the papal church. We are grieved and astonished at the forms and ceremonies and pomps and mummeries and priestly domination that has assumed to be the religion of him who was meek and lowly—who went about doing good—who had not where to lay his head—who taught men to worship God in spirit and in truth. We would be of his spirit. We would teach men every where the great lessons that he taught; if it should be necessary in that mighty struggle, the foretokenings of which he must be blind who does not see, we would pray for strength to yield ourselves to the baptism with which he was baptized.

And this leads me to remark, finally, that those who would promote the spiritual and true worship of God, should themselves be spiritual and holy men. This is the one thing needful in the ministry of any church or under any form. This we would embrace in the arms of our affection wherever we find it. This can irradiate and beautify, as the sunlight the evening cloud, any form not contrary to the spirit of the gospel, and without this, all forms, even our own, will become but as the material upon which a false religion will be enthroned to the terror and corruption, or on which it will be gibbeted, for the mockery of mankind. But let there be a faithful, humble, holy ministry, and the word, and worship, and ordinances of God will be honored. From them there will go out an influence such as can go from them alone, that will be felt for good in every interest and in every relation of society. God will set his seal upon their labors. Not

more certain is the promise of seed time and harvest than that "they that sow in tears shall reap in joy." There will be joy in heaven over repenting sinners. There will be joy on earth, because "Zion shall arise and shine, her light being come;" and there will be joy when the chief Shepherd shall appear, and such pastors shall go up with their flocks to stand before him. Amen.

SERMON CCCLVIII.

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CHRISTIAN COURTESY.

"Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble."—1 Peter, v. 5.

EVERY well ordered society has its laws of intercourse. In polite society these laws, or usages, go under the general name of etiquette and custom. The intercourse of neighbors, as such, is regulated by such proprieties as are understood to pertain to good neighborhood. More particular societies, such as deliberative assemblies, corporations, and the like, have their more specific regulations. There could be no society—no agreeable intercourse between individuals, as social beings, without such laws. Barbarism itself finds them necessary.

These social laws are not always reduced to writing; nor are they susceptible of it. Nor are they in all respects exactly defined. But their existence and propriety are understood, and generally respected. Every one, at least, who pretends to good manners, is supposed to recognize them, and to know their general limits, and about where, if not always exactly where, they are transgressed.

Now a *Christian church* is a society; and is eminently social in its design and constitution. No human society, the family excepted, is supposed to involve a greater intimacy among its members. It therefore needs its social laws,—needs them eminently. And it has them. They are laid down in the Scriptures, and particularly in the New Testament, with as much distinctness as the case admits of. They do not undertake to define and make palpable the exact bounds and lines of religious social propriety; they leave much to the good sense and good will of the members, as all society does. But they give some

specific precepts; and for the rest, they point out the great and essential principles of propriety, by which they expect us always to be governed.

These principles are *modesty* and *benevolence*; which are indeed the basis of all true politeness. These two qualities, though they may not ensure a graceful or *accomplished* manner, are sufficient to guard the minds that are properly imbued with them from whatever is rude and offensive. A truly kind and modest person seldom offends against refined politeness in social life; nor does a truly humble and benevolent member of the church offend against the propriety which ought to characterise the intercourse of that society.

These laws, pertaining to the religious and social intercourse of Christians, are partly written in the text. *Likewise ye younger submit yourselves to the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another; and be clothed with humility.* Others, scattered through the Scriptures, are such as follow. *Be courteous. Be kindly affectionate one to another, with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another. Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.* These, with other similar precepts, taken together, form an admirable social code.

Let us give our attention, now, to the particular precepts which are contained in our text. Some care is necessary to ascertain the meaning of the language. *Likewise ye younger submit yourselves to the elder.* The terms *elder* and *younger* are relative. Primarily they refer to comparative ages. They are also used in the Scriptures in reference to *place* and *station*. Those who occupy official stations in the church, as teachers and rulers, are called seniors, or elders; while those who are the subjects of their teaching or oversight, are called juniors.

It being the order of nature that the older should teach and guide the younger, the terms naturally come to be applied to those who stand in such relations to each other, without regard to age. I suppose the apostle has respect to *both* these senses. Let the taught be subject to their teachers, the governed to their guides and overseers; and let the younger in years be subject to those that are more advanced in life.

Yea all of you be subject one to another. Ye younger be subject to the elder. But what is the *submission* or *subjection* he intends? He means a proper *deference* to others, according to the relations between us and them. Members of the church should show a proper respect to their pastors—a proper and becoming deference to their office, their authority, and their teaching. The younger members should show a becoming respect to those older than themselves in years and piety—a becoming deference to their wisdom and experience, and to all those claims which are naturally conceded to superior age. To one another the members should show the respect which is due to fellow members—each showing modesty and kindness towards the persons, opinions, feelings, and rights of the others. In a word, there

should be nothing of arrogance, conceit, disrespect, or self-will in the intercourse of Christians; but every one should exhibit the amiable demeanor of one who properly appreciates and respects the relations of parties.

Omitting other relations which are concerned in the text, I will discuss only those of the members towards each other, and those of the younger towards the older.

I. We will consider the demeanor which is expected in the members *towards each other*. *Yea, all of you be subject one to another.*

By being subject one to another, it is meant, as I have remarked, that they should mutually and properly respect each other's feelings, judgments, and rights. It is not meant that no one should have an opinion of his own; nor that he should not express it. This is not desirable. Nor does the apostle mean to forbid that *special* respect shall be paid to peculiar worth. If a member be a person of more than ordinary intelligence and piety, he is of course to be respected and esteemed accordingly. There is nothing of a *levelling* character in our text, nor is there in the gospel. Quite the contrary. The gospel does indeed place all men, in some respects, on a level; but it also acknowledges comparative moral worth, and commands respect to be paid wherever it is due, whether in the church or out;—tribute to whom tribute; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

It were preposterous to say that a Hale, or an Evarts, or a Wilberforce, should have no more respect or influence in the church than the weakest member in it. And yet this is what too many, professing religion, are willing enough to claim. Is it not a fact that some make it a ground of preference for joining one church rather than another, that in *that* communion they are *all upon a level*; and no one is expected to esteem any other more wise, or competent, or pious than himself? They seem to regard the church of Christ as a sort of platform, which places all persons and all things upon an equal footing—where ignorance and knowledge, youth and age, office and private station, and male and female, shall have a common currency, and receive a like consideration!

But our text, while it inculcates entire modesty and respect on the part of all, and supposes even the highest worth to be slow to assert its claims, (as indeed it will,) contemplates no *such* state of things as I have described. Let every one have, and freely express, the sentiments he honestly entertains, and assert his rights, if necessary; but at the same time, let him show always a becoming deference, and charity, and good will, towards the sentiments and wishes of his brethren, and especially towards the church as a body.

It will not be necessary that I should be more particular as to the apostle's meaning. But let us now consider what *arguments* there are for such a demeanor as he requires.

And first, such deportment is amiable and proper in itself. It is in

keeping with the spirit of the gospel, the leading traits of which are humility, gentleness, and love. And it goes far to recommend religion to the world; while a different demeanor goes far, and very far, to *discredit* religion. Where should we expect to find the finest exhibition of the true courtesies of life, if not among those whose hearts and minds are supposed to be imbued with the lovely spirit of the gospel? Must we go to the vain and fashionable world to find better manners than are cultivated in the church? And shall Chesterfield be a more successful teacher on this subject than Jesus and his apostles? You will not understand me, by this allusion, as asking for the church the embellishments of fashionable life: I only plead for the substance and reality of that genuine urbanity of which the world affects the forms.

II. That the members shall be subject one to another, as the apostle directs, is essential to the *harmony* of the church. We all have human feelings; we have human infirmities and passions, and are liable to many errors; and it requires much mutual respect, concession, and forbearance, to live agreeably in any human society. Where these virtues are wanting, in the church, the family, or elsewhere, there will be more or less unpleasant feeling. If one or more members set up for superior wisdom, and insist, however honestly, on having things their own way, showing no deference to the judgment, or the wishes, or the piety of others, disgust and discord are likely to ensue. Or even if a *majority*, acting upon the theory that the majority shall always govern, shows no respect to the feelings, or judgment of the minority, the harmony of the church is endangered, if not sacrificed.

The majority ought indeed to determine questions; and the minority, however large, ought cheerfully to submit; but, at the same time, the minority, however small, has its right to be heard and treated with respect. And there are cases where the major party ought, as a matter of courtesy and good feeling, (I do not say of right,) to give way to the minority.

It may be better to sacrifice a measure, even of some importance in the view of the majority, than to sacrifice good feeling,—however unreasonable it may be in the minority to require it. And where conscience is not invaded, and among honest people, it almost always is unreasonable in a minority to expect it. Let the few yield to the many; this is the only principle upon which communities can act. But let all parties act in the spirit of our text. How many bitter animosities, and disgraceful schisms would be saved by such a spirit pervading all concerned!

III. Conformity to this precept is essential to the wholesome *action* of the church. Cases may occur, in which the few are wiser than the many; or even a single individual may be right, and all the rest in error. But I do not believe that this is *generally*, or *frequently* the

fact—especially after consultation. The presumption always is, that the collected wisdom of the many is better than the opinion of the few. And there is Scripture for this belief. *In the multitude of counsellors there is safety.* And this proverb of the wise man is confirmed by much experience.

It has very generally been seen that where the few have had their way, the many following against their judgment, the issue has been evil. The proper way is, for each one to give, with modesty, his own views and reasons, and hear respectfully the views of others; and then acquiesce in the judgment of the majority. If he cannot yield his *convictions* in the matter, he can, at least, refrain from wounded pride and active opposition. This is amiable and modest, and it certainly is *reasonable*. For if it be hard for *one* to conform himself to the judgment of the many, it is still harder that the *many* should submit themselves to one.

IV. I will only add on this head, and as a fourth argument for conformity to this precept, that it is promotive of the best virtues in individual members. It is an admirable means of self-discipline. Brought as we are, in the church, into an intimate, and responsible, and active, fellowship with a variety of persons, of different ages, capacities, tempers, and degrees of information, we have occasion for the constant exercise of charity, respect, patience, condescension, and especially, *humility*, the loveliest of all the virtues; dispositions which are not native in us, and which require exercise to keep them in existence, and much exercise to bring them to perfection.

There is too much reason to confess that pride, self-sufficiency, and a spirit of dictation, and uncharitableness, sometimes, in individual cases, grow more rapidly in the church than in almost any other society. In the humble and familiar brotherhood of Christians, if any be disposed to be officious, opinionative, and intolerant, proud, heady, high-minded, and such as Diotrophes, who loved to have the pre-eminence, they have an opportunity to do so. But this is the fault of the individuals, and of human nature, and not of the institution. No society is so fitted as the church, if its laws be conformed to, for the cultivation of the opposites of these unamiable dispositions; in proof of which such precepts as my text, and many bright examples may be adduced.

And it should be observed here, that the Apostle in giving us this precept signifies to us that *humility* is essential to its performance. 'Be subject one to another, and be clothed with *humility*.' Be humble, that you may be subject. Paul signifies the same. 'Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory; but in *lowliness of mind*, let each esteem other better than themselves.' And James speaks in a similar manner, 'Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge,' &c. iii. 13. Our Savior also taught the same virtue of humility by a significant action, washing the disciples' feet. We must cultivate humility and meekness then as a prerequisite to the fulfilment of this pre-

cept. And what does *observation* teach us on this subject? If we look through the church, in all ages, what are the manifestations with regard to this virtue, which those make who are least subject to their brethren? It is not the most humble and self-distrusting, nor the most wise, nor the most consistent, that find the most difficulty to act harmoniously and pleasantly with their fellow members. *Zeal* they may have, and honesty, and efficiency; but they are wanting in *humility*.

And in this connection let us turn our thoughts for a moment to that impressive consideration in which the Apostle *enforces* what he says, and which forms a part of our text. Be subject one to another, and be clothed with *humility*, he says; *for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble*. What a check should such a thought as this be to pride; and to all such behavior as has its source in pride! And when we find ourselves disposed to differ with our brethren, and especially with the majority of them, and are strenuous to have our own views prevail, our own schemes adopted, our own wills or wishes gratified, let us inquire with ourselves how far our conduct proceeds from this unlovely and too often unperceived disposition, pride. How many are there who know not what spirit they are of,—who, while they flatter themselves that they are doing God service, and receiving his approbation, are really hateful in his sight!

But I must turn now to a brief consideration of that other relation of which the text speaks—that of *the younger towards the elder*. My design was to make this my principal topic; but I have not allowed myself the necessary time. This however is not perhaps to be regretted, as the same arguments which have been used in reference to the mutual deportment of brethren generally, are easily transferable to this branch of our subject. And they apply here in superior force. If mutual respect and deference be amiable and proper among equals, it is still more becoming in the younger to show respect and deference to the older. And if in *that* particular, the church ought to be an example to the world, much more ought it to be in *this*. Where should the children and youth of the community be pointed to examples of respect paid to the wisdom and gravity of years, if not in Christian families and in the church?

And again, as it regards the *wholesome action* of the church, it is very important that the younger should submit themselves to the elder. I am the more concerned to make this remark, and to give some prominence to it, because I apprehend that the fashion of the times requires it. It is not the practice of the present age as it once was, especially in the early days of New-England, for the young to show a marked respect to their seniors. That precept of nature and the Scriptures, 'Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of the old man,' is gone, there is cause to fear, or fast going, into disuse. The fact in regard to families, and in regard to the community generally, is commonly spoken of and acknowledged. The same impropriety exists in religious societies. Our religious arrangements are made with a special, and sometimes almost exclusive reference to the views

and wishes of the young. Thus, e. g., if a minister is to be settled, the inquiry is, not who will be the most judicious, sound, instructive preacher; but who will be most pleasing to the young. And so in other matters, which might be specified.

Now I do by no means object to regard being had, as far as may be wise, to that portion of our congregations. They are the hope of the church, and all hopeful means ought to be used to interest them in the business of religion. But I do not think it expedient that they should have the *leading* influence, either directly or indirectly in religious affairs, rather than the older members of the church. And I give these following reasons.

1. The inherent, natural propriety of the thing,—upon which I will not dwell.

2. The best interests of the cause of Christ require it. The older members—older in years, and older in the church—are better qualified to judge of doctrines and measures than those who are younger and more recent. It were indeed a pity if they were not—if they have been long in the school of Christ, and gained no wisdom by it, they have read the Bible more; have prayed, conversed, and reflected more; have learned more of the human heart; have seen more revivals, and had longer opportunity to judge of measures and results. Experience and observation, and the word and Spirit of God, have 'taught them the way of God more perfectly' than they once understood it; and I appeal to all experienced Christians whether they have not seen cause as they have grown older, to change and modify their views in regard to many things. And if this be so, is it not safer for religion that their counsels should shape affairs, rather than the unripe counsels of the young?

Let me be answered *this*: Whether Christians that have been long converted, and in the church, are not wiser in religion than they themselves were when they were new in religion? And if they are, whether it is not presumable that they are wiser than those who *now* are young, and new in religion, as they once were? And, admitting this, does it not hence follow that this acquired wisdom of theirs, should be available to the church? But how can it, if the young are not to submit themselves to the elder? And let us refer the matter to the Head of the church himself, and gather his will upon the subject. He has expressed his will in the text, and in numerous other scriptures; and it is inferable from the nature of the case. To say that older Christians shall not have the paramount direction of measures, under Christ, is in effect to say, that Christ's own teaching, so far as regards the usefulness of his disciples, shall amount to nothing. To what purpose is it that he has been long training his more advanced disciples? He has been teaching and disciplining them through a course of years, by his word, by his Spirit, and by his providence, and causing them to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of himself; and can it be agreeable to him that all this training, all this profiting in them, shall be of no utility to his cause? But how can it be ser-

viceable, if these experienced disciples are to resign the direction of affairs to those who are but novices in religion? Is this, I say, the mind of Christ? And does he choose that his great cause on earth shall be even in the condition of Rehoboam among his counsellors; who rejected the wisdom of the old men, and preferred that of the young?

3. I believe that the young themselves, would, in the end, be best satisfied and most happy in the church. They would feel a truer respect for it, and would be more humble and teachable.

Finally: how well would it be, both for the public interests of religion, and for the private satisfaction and improvement of the parties, if all concerned would behave agreeably to the spirit of the precept before us! If respect were never wanting towards the aged; nor condescension to the young; nor charity towards equals;—if humility and love pervaded the fraternity; and if the *pastoral relation* shared also in these holy dispositions, neither of the parties to it forgetting what is due in that relation to the other, what a happy exhibition of the social virtues would the church make!—and how impressive to the world!

I have discussed this text, because it is a divine precept, very solemnly enforced, and belonging to a class of precepts which I believe it to be the duty sometimes, if not frequently, to exhibit from the pulpit. I have discussed it with a general reference to the community at large, and not because there was any special call for it here. If it have any applicability to this particular community, I hope it may have some effect to correct the evil to which it has respect: if there be no present occasion for it here, it may still be well that it has been before us, as it may serve to forestall evils which, here, as well as elsewhere, are incident to churches; being the offspring of human nature.